

How not to be ‘ghosted’ by new or potential hires

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Perhaps this has happened to you: After scheduling an interview with a great candidate, the person doesn’t show up—or even call to cancel. Or worse, a brand new hire doesn’t show up for his or her first day of work and never calls to explain why. You’ve been “ghosted.”

In case you haven’t heard the term before, “ghosting” originated in the dating world as a way to describe someone who ends a relationship by simply disappearing—no returned calls, messages or social media response. Ghosting is no longer confined to personal relationships, however. Most employers now report the phenomenon is occurring in the workplace as well.

While it’s not a new concept, ghosting in the workplace has become frustratingly common. Low unemployment and the easy availability of jobs are commonly cited as the rationale for this trend. The possibility of multiple employment opportunities can certainly explain why a candidate might change his or her mind about accepting a particular job, but it doesn’t explain why that person doesn’t have the courtesy to call and explain.

There are those who argue that turnabout is fair play because, let’s face it, employers have been ghosting employees for years. Not that companies necessarily miss appointments, but they’ve often relied on the old standby promise after an interview, “We’ll get back to you,” and then never do.

It’s the easy way out for the employer, but it leaves a lasting bad impression of your company—one candidates undoubtedly share with their friends. Add to that the many layoffs companies have undertaken in recent years, which have led to an erosion of trust in the workforce, and some employees have concluded, “Why should I worry about them? They’re not worried about me.”

The truth is that, with candidates in the driver’s seat these days, ghosting will probably stick around as long as the economy stays strong. That doesn’t mean you can’t take steps to try to minimize it, though. So what can you do?

First, make it personal. Increasingly, employers are relying on technology to communicate with candidates, rather than calling and having an actual conversation. Texting someone to make arrangements might save time and even be the preferred method for the candidate, but it also removes the human connection. Establishing a personal connection doesn’t mean the candidate won’t take another job, but it can build a mutual respect that inspires him or her to give you a proper heads-up.

Second, examine your hiring process. Is your organization guilty of long delays that leave hopeful candidates in the dark? In this economy, it’s unrealistic to assume a candidate is holding

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his or her breath waiting to hear from you. There are other jobs out there and your candidates are no doubt applying for them, as well. By the time you are ready to make an offer, a candidate is likely pretty far along in the process with another employer, too. Given your lack of communication with candidates, they won't feel all that obligated to tell you they're not going to be there next Monday morning.

Finally, understand that this is the new norm, at least for now. Your recruiting process should be proactive in identifying multiple candidates, and you should never zero in on just one candidate too early in the process. In industries with notoriously high turnover, such as retail and restaurants, this can mean bringing in many more individuals to interview than you actually expect to hire—and hoping that at least half of them actually show up.

Being ghosted is not only frustrating, it also creates a very real cost to your organization. Estimates vary based on occupation and job level, but it's generally accepted that the cost to hire one person can range from \$1,000 to \$5,000, and that cost can go much higher for executive-level jobs. When someone ghosts you on what should have been his or her first day of employment, your investment of time and resources in that person is lost, and you find yourself back at square one with the same position to fill.

It's unlikely that you can avoid ghosting altogether, but by establishing personal, ongoing communication and a process that makes it clear to candidates that they are valued, you might be able to mitigate the trend and save yourself a few headaches in the process.